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Activities of the Joint Inspection Unit of relevance to the United Nations Children's Fund

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides information on reports prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit during the period September 2000 through September 2001, and of relevance to UNICEF, which heretofore were not considered by the Executive Board, and presents the views of the UNICEF Executive Director on these matters.

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I. Overview

1. Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) are submitted to the executive heads of the organizations concerned, who then act upon them, as appropriate, and report to their relevant Executive Boards. The present document provides information on JIU reports issued from September 2000 through September 2001 that are considered relevant to the administration and management of UNICEF, together with comments regarding the conclusions and recommendations contained therein, and a summary of actions undertaken.

2. Since the previous report (E/ICEF/2001/5), UNICEF has continued its ongoing dialogue with JIU on handling of the reports and on procedures for subsequent follow-up. This greater intensity of dialogue and interaction on issues of common interest have increased the relevance of the reports, improved implementation of recommendations and enhanced transparency.

3. In addition, these consultations have led to an improved basic framework for the handling of JIU reports, involving a series of mutually agreed upon actions. Under these procedures, upon receipt of the draft of a JIU report for comments, the Executive Director will now include in her comments an indication of whether the report is, in her opinion, relevant to UNICEF and, if it is not considered relevant, provide justification. The criteria for determining the relevance of reports to UNICEF will be whether the report in question and the recommendations therein satisfy any of the following criteria: (a) fits within the mandate and purposes of the organization; (b) has a bearing on the efficiency of the services and proper use of funds; (c) is aimed at improving management and methods, and at achieving greater coordination among organizations; (d) is aimed at assisting the Executive Board in carrying out its responsibility for external evaluation of programmes and activities; and (e) is aimed at advising the organization on the methods for internal evaluation, or periodically assessing these methods, or making ad hoc evaluations of programmes and activities.

4. Where reports are determined to have relevance, they will be submitted as final reports to the Executive Director for circulation to the members of the Executive Board. These reports, along with the comments of the Executive Director, will be available for discussion under the appropriate substantive agenda. The subsequent implementation and follow-up of the findings and recommendations of JIU will take into account the comments and decisions of the Executive Board. As appropriate, the Executive Director will submit to the Executive Board status reports concerning the measures taken on the implementation of approved recommendations of JIU, including those falling within the purview of the Executive Director.

II. Reports submitted by the Joint Inspection Unit of direct interest to the United Nations Children's Fund

5. Since the issuance of the most recent note of the secretariat to the Executive Board on JIU reports of relevance to UNICEF (E/ICEF/2001/5), JIU has issued several reports of interest to UNICEF. The comments, observations and follow-up notes of UNICEF are summarized below.

A. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations system common services at Geneva: Part II — case studies (JIU/REP/2000/5), and the comments of the Secretary-General on this report (A/55/856/Add.1)

6. This report establishes a coherent framework for the creation and strengthening of a unified, comprehensive and centralized common services entity for United Nations organizations located at Geneva to enable them to rationalize their overhead structures and costs and to concentrate diminishing resources on their constitutional mandates. The objective of the case studies is to identify key strengths and constraints of some existing services in order to derive lessons that can be applied in accordance with the plan of action for Geneva common services, 2000-2010.

7. JIU points out that, despite their attractiveness, the potential of existing common services is not being harnessed to its full extent, and goes on to underscore the need for strategic direction for Geneva common services. It notes that executive heads of Geneva-based specialized agencies and member States have an important role in preserving and perfecting the system.

8. While not physically part of the United Nations Office at Geneva, in some key domains mentioned in the JIU report, UNICEF is appreciative of the JIU analyses on key issues around common services at Geneva and has been involved in related feasibility studies. UNICEF is a partner organization of the International Computing Centre (ICC) and a member of the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Working Group on the Coordination of Information and Communication Technologies in the United Nations system. While direct use of services provided by ICC is dependent on corporate priorities and the quality, efficiency and costs of the Centre's services, there is potential for UNICEF and the Centre to develop further linkages as part of system-wide actions to share relevant information, establish a policy of staff exchanges, strengthen the collection of strategic information, and commission independent technical audits on information technology issues.

9. With respect to the specific recommendations of JIU, UNICEF is involved in the following specific matters, and is in concurrence with the proposals made by JIU:

(a) The Geneva-based United Nations system should develop a bold and long-term vision for the Joint Medical Service;

(b) While the recently renamed Staff Development and Learning Section has not yet considered the training needs of specialized agencies, there is room for greater collaboration and cooperation between the Geneva-based entities. Prior to any discussion of mandates or budgeting, there is a need for a comprehensive review of the situation in Geneva and the requirements of all organizations;

(c) The Diplomatic Pouch Service should be modernized;

(d) The Joint Purchase Service can be further strengthened.

B. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the delegation of authority for management of human and financial resources in the United Nations Secretariat (JIU/REP/2000/6), and the comments of the Secretary-General on this report (A/55/857/Add.1)

10. The JIU recommendations in this report relate to ongoing efforts in the United Nations to promote the delegation of authority throughout the system, and especially to programme managers. The background for the recommendations is the new management culture that is emerging after the recent introduction of results-based management. In the pursuit of an effective system of accountability, the elements are available to build an integrated continuum between responsibility, authority and accountability. The report emphasizes the ensuing need to establish a culture of clarity, transparency and communication, in an overall plan of action for the delegation of authority.

11. UNICEF notes the references made to it in the report, and the presentation of how it manages the delegation of responsibilities and accountability to representatives at the country level, with the oversight function devolved to the regional offices. UNICEF practices in this regard are consistent with the recommendations of the JIU report, in particular with regard to the establishment of a framework of accountability.

12. UNICEF has always been one of the most field-based organizations of the United Nations system, and has progressively decentralized programme management responsibilities to the country teams, with increasingly clear and consistent objectives for internal control. UNICEF took this trend to another level when, in 1996, global management excellence was introduced as an absolute corporate priority. UNICEF then prepared the comprehensive and detailed administrative instructions for this priority to be fully reflected in the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 (E/ICEF/1998/13 and corr.1).

13. Through the process, the ethic of accountability was strengthened at all levels, beginning at the level of the country programme. In strict conformity with established policies, UNICEF has effectively decentralized the management responsibilities for human and financial resources to programme managers in the field. Country teams, in the person of the country representative, have become fully accountable, and the oversight function rests with the regional director.

C. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on young professionals in selected organizations of the United Nations system: recruitment, management and retention (JIU/REP/2000/7), and the comments of the Secretary-General on this report (A/55/798/Add.1)

14. The JIU objective was to compare and analyse policies and practices with regard to the recruitment and management of entry-level Professionals and to make recommendations to prepare and retain a cadre of dedicated and competent Professionals. Key recommendations made in the JIU report include:

(a) Specific efforts to reduce the age at recruitment (for P-1 to P-3 posts in particular);

(b) More careful monitoring of trends on separations;

(c) Set up structures to assist the integration of young professionals;

(d) Increase opportunities for young professionals to be assigned both at headquarters and in the field;

(e) Improve career development for young professionals;

(f) For managers to devote more time and attention to the development of their junior staff;

(g) Facilitate spouse employment.

15. In his comments on this JIU report, the Secretary-General notes that there is no single "best practice" in human resources management to which United Nations agencies can look as a universal model. Best practice is that which works best in the context and interests of each individual organization. The Secretary-General adds that it is important to view the specific recommendations of this report on recruitment and retention, on the reduction of undesirable turnover and on the promotion of institutional loyalty against a background of contemporary competitive employment conditions which are very different from when the international civil service started operating more than 50 years ago.

16. UNICEF appreciates the inter-agency perspective of this JIU report and the knowledge it provides of the situation across the system. UNICEF is in agreement with the thrust of the report when it urges the United Nations system to address holistically the issue of age at recruitment and the conditions that define retention. As a matter of priority, UNICEF had been focusing on several of the key recommendations in the report. On specific recommendations regarding recruitment, the JIU report notes that the UNICEF National Professional Officers (NPOs) category is a good source for the recruitment of international Professionals from developing countries. On the other hand, Junior Professional Officers remain one of the privileged sources for recruitment from developed countries. While UNICEF has relatively few P-1 and P-2 level staff members, this is partially offset by a considerable number of staff in the junior levels (A and B) of the NPO category. Management, as a matter of policy, encourages them to apply to any international post that is advertised internally and for which they consider themselves suitable.

17. On the stated problems of staff retention, UNICEF is of the view that the important matter of dual United Nations/UNICEF career couples merits special attention. UNICEF concurs with the view that this matter has not always received the needed priority focus, and would note that this particular subject is now being addressed by the United Nations Development Group Executive Committee. Moreover, UNICEF notes that relevant spouse employment is usually more difficult to accommodate in smaller duty stations. The UNICEF view is that in some cases, host countries could grant permits for spouses. UNICEF has expressed satisfaction with the approach of the upcoming JIU report on "Host country agreements entered into by the organizations of the United Nations system", which is now in the course of reviewing the matter of permits for spousal employment.

D. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on strengthening the investigations function in the United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2000/9), and report of the Secretary-General on this report (A/56/282)

18. This JIU report addresses the major issues of the investigations function in United Nations system organizations: common standards and procedures; training of managers; the need for access to a professional investigations capability; the need for preventive measures to reduce vulnerability to wrongdoing; and inter-agency cooperation.

19. UNICEF takes note of the conclusions and the recommendations of the report, and has shared with JIU how these have enhanced its already existing capability to meet the need for investigations. References made to UNICEF in the report note that the organization meets requirements allowing for the investigations function to be carried out effectively. The investigative function in UNICEF falls primarily within the purview of the Office of Internal Audit. However, heads of offices also have important roles to play in terms of evidence presented at the investigative stage. Fully in line with the recommendations of the report, UNICEF has developed and adopted common standards and procedures for conducting investigations.

20. The Division of Human Resources (DHR) has espoused a three-pronged approach to ensure the representatives and officers-in-charge have the required capacities. DHR, as the entity which oversees this task:

(a) Manages the process when formal charges of misconduct are brought against a staff member;

(b) Conducts training initiatives in fraud awareness and disciplinary procedures;

(c) Develops preventive measures based on lessons learned from completed investigations as well as from proactive investigations.

21. The internal oversight services and the investigations function have strong support from the Executive Director. UNICEF meets the requirements of operational independence of those responsible for internal oversight. In terms of the need for preventive measures to reduce vulnerability, the report notes for UNICEF the pertinent distinction between proactive audit and reactive investigation. UNICEF has the processes in place to assess vulnerability and profile risk.

III. Forthcoming reports of the Joint Inspection Unit of interest to the United Nations Children's Fund

22. UNICEF looks forward to presenting its comments, as appropriate, on some or all of the following ongoing reviews and JIU reports that may have relevance to the work of the organization at the first regular session of 2003.

(a) Technical cooperation projects and their end-beneficiaries: case studies in the field of water resources. (Participatory hygiene education — Zimbabwe; Water, sanitation and hygiene education — Zambia; and Low-cost sanitation systems in Tegucigalpa — Honduras);

(b) Host country agreements entered into by the organizations of the United Nations system;

(c) Review of the field service category of personnel;

(d) Multilingualism in the United Nations system and evaluation of the optical disk system;

(e) Management information systems: lessons learned from the experience of the United Nations system organizations;

(f) United Nations system revenue-producing activities: income generation and cost recovery;

(g) The involvement of the civil society organizations in technical cooperation projects, in selected United Nations entities.

IV. Action required by the Executive Board

23. The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report, which provides information on reports of the Joint Inspection Unit issued from September 2000 through September 2001, that have particular relevance to the administration and management of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2002/5).